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FM AMEMBASSY ANTANANARIVO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4700
INFO RUCNSAD/SADC COLLECTIVE
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0882

UNCLAS ANTANANARIVO 000409

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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DEPT FOR AF/E, AF/FO, INR/AA, AND DRL
PARIS FOR D'ELIA

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [MA](#)
SUBJECT: Coastal City Boils Over Electricity Outages

REF: Antananarivo 362

¶1. (SBU) Public discontent over electricity outages boiled over April 26 as thousands of protestors set fire to a public building in the southern coastal city of Tulear. According to sources in the gendarmerie, members of the mob also kidnapped the regional director of the Penitentiary Administration. Seven rioters have already been arrested. Police contacts fear the situation will worsen as long as JIRAMA (the electric utility) fails to turn the lights back on.

¶2. (SBU) Embassy security contacts suggest public frustration about the black-out is likely being fanned by opportunistic opposition leaders. Already trying to stir up trouble after the arrest of Roland Ratsiraka (reftel), Tulear-native Jean Lahiniriko could be encouraging the protestors. The other coastal opposition strongholds of Tamatave and Diego Suarez are quiet after some disruptions earlier in the week.

¶3. (SBU) COMMENT: As evidenced in the last election, Malagasy opposition leaders typically have neither the resources nor the inspiration to rally large numbers of supporters. The coincidence of power outages and Ratsiraka's arrest provide backing to the politicians claims that the highland President Ravalomanana neglects coastal areas. Historical cleavages between plateau "Merina" and coastal Malagasy will continue to be exploited by the opposition if Ravalomanana is not more tactful; starting with finding a way to restore electricity to coastal cities. END COMMENT.

MCGEE